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674 approached, and that in a fit of rage at his wife's infidelity he had killed her; and then later admitted that he had gone to the cave, but denied that he ever approached Jimme sexually. He said that he had been sitting on the rocks above when his wife threw a stone at him. He slapped her, and she fell accidentally from the rocks and was killed.

There can be little doubt, however, that the prosecution story was true. When the police searched the cave, they found on the dust of the floor the clear signs of a woman lying on her back and a pair of footprints on either side [833] of the marks made by the woman's buttocks. This clearly shows that intercourse practised according to the normal aboriginal technique had been in progress, and Jimme confirmed the fact.

Paklu, when I saw him in jail, was still young, a man of [697] fine physique and good-looking. He has behaved well in jail, for he has been made a Lambardar and wears the tall yellow cap which indicates his office.

762 578 Nine cases of suicide were due to disputes between wife and husband. Thus Kome is said to have been quick-tempered, a person who always exaggerated things. She was a young wife, only twenty years old, and when her husband came in one day tired and wet from the fields, and found no food ready, and abused her, she took a rope and slipped out of the house. Her husband, also young, found some stale food and took it back to the field. When he came home in the evening his wife was dead.

Mate had a row with her husband over lighting the fire. He was drunk and beat her, and she attacked him. But her [607] husband's elder brother, to whom she was strictly taboo and who had no business to touch her, intervened and beat her also. During the night, she left the house and tried to get across the Indrawati River in order to reach her mother's house. But there was no ferry and she hanged herself with her clothes. It is worthy of note that although there was a deep river at hand, the girl preferred to end her life by hanging.

An unusually tragic incident occurred at Metapal in February 1937. Kuhrami Hurra returned one day from the bazaar and found that one of his calves had been killed by a panther. Rightly or wrongly he considered that this was

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE ABORIGINAL PRISONER

I

How do the Maria get on in jail? This is a question that only a Jailor can answer, but I have been told by those responsible for aboriginal prisoners what an appalling ordeal prison life is for people accustomed to the great freedoms of the hills and forests. 'If a Maria is sentenced to a long term of imprisonment', says Grigson, 'he will beg to be hanged rather than be confined within walls: and few of the wilder Bison-horn Maria survive long imprisonment'.[1] The grim forbidding walls, the stone beds, the rule of silence, the attitude of suppliant and obsequious deference before officials, the absence of any kind of recreation, the lack of all religious comfort, the denial of human companionship, the appalling monotony oppress and crush them. The Maria is perhaps insensitive to mental suffering, but on the other hand he has no reserve of philosophical or intellectual fortitude to draw on in a crisis. To him life with a woman and daily intercourse with her, a good supply of tobacco, the rough simple food of his village and the not infrequent stimulus of alcohol are perhaps the only necessities of existence. But they are necessary, and many prisoners have told me that they missed these things far more than the restraint upon their liberty.

How do the prisoners themselves look back on their experience? I will attempt to discover this by quoting their own sayings. Markami Doga said, 'I felt very sad in jail, and my thoughts were always in my house'. Another man said that he was continually worrying about his children and who would look after them. Another was distracted lest in his absence his cattle would be distributed like fowls among the neighbours. Many of the prisoners with whom I talked in jail had an extremely sad and pitiable look. I particularly remember the suffering on the face of Habka Masa who had

[1] Grigson, op. cit., p. 96. Since this was written, improved conditions in the Jagdalpur jail have increased the life-expectation of all the prisoners.

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697 killed his wife, and of Marvi Kuma who described how much he missed his wife and children and was always wondering whether they got enough food to eat. Vetti Rupe told me that he was continually thinking of his family. Dasru, himself a magician, was worried because in prison there was no Siraha to consult about the various untoward things that happened. The three men who had been sentenced from Pinna Bheji and whom I met after their release said, 'The worst thing was we always were thinking of our cattle and our homes, and to feel that we had got into prison by accident. We could hardly eat for the memory of our children'.

697 838 839 These aboriginal prisoners are remarkable in not finding sex a problem while they are in jail. This statement will probably be received with incredulity by many of my readers. I can only say that I have gone into the matter as fully as anyone could who was not himself a jail official or a prisoner setting out to investigate this particular point. The jail officials, who know their people at least as well as officials elsewhere, some of whom have had very long experience, have told me that cases of homosexuality are unknown and that even masturbation is not practised by the aboriginal prisoners. When I have discussed the same matter with released convicts they have all said the same thing, and I am inclined to believe them, because they have shown no reticence in speaking freely and even coarsely about other sexual matters. I think it is possible that the Maria who in his natural state is, as far as I can discover, completely innocent of any kind of sexual deviation simply would not think it possible that any substitute could give him satisfaction or indeed could be practised. The thing just would not occur to him.[1]

697 831 What is generally believed is that medicine is put in the food. I do not suggest this is so, but it is what is supposed. One after another has described how he never got any erection at all while in jail, and several people have found themselves impotent for a time after their release. Barse Mata of Gamawada declared that he had never even felt

[1] It would be hard to imagine a greater contrast to this than, for example, the conditions described by J. F. Fishman in his *Sex in Prison* (London, 1935).

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697 desire while in jail. Boti of Telam declared that the doctor
831 had made them all impotent by medicine put in the food. On the other hand, Pandru of Chichari said that he frequently suffered from erections in jail and from nocturnal emissions. Naturally, however, the worst thing about jail-life is the deprivation of the company of women, though many Maria would modify this by saying that it is rather the whole family atmosphere, houses, children, cattle as well as the wife, that was missed. When I asked one youth what jail-life was like, he said, 'No wife, no bazaar, no children, no family'. But the thing that most oppressed him in jail was the silence.

697 The food in jail is excellent, far better than the prisoners get in their own homes. Since 1935, a special effort has been made to improve the health of the prisoners among whom at one period there had been a rather heavy mortality. The result has been highly satisfactory. There was only 1 death in 1938, 2 in 1939 and 4 in 1940. Accommodation in the jail is for 308 prisoners and the daily average is between 210 and 230. Special measures are taken against respiratory diseases, notably influenza. Phyrnoderma (toad-skin), which was one of the chief causes of reduced vitality among aboriginal prisoners, has been practically banished by the prophylactic administration of meat and cod liver oil. The ex-convicts generally grumble at the food and declare that they are continually unwell, but all reports agree in saying that they actually eat heartily and keep very fit. I think the real fact is that the food is unfamiliar to them and that many of them suffer from nervousness and a general psychic depression which makes them feel wretched, even though their actual bodily health is excellent. Several prisoners have declared how they long for roots and the gruels prepared in the ordinary way at home.

697 The work given to the prisoners varies. Some of the
564 Maria work in the kitchens, and it is interesting that the Hindu prisoners respect their social status and agree to eat from them. Ghasia and Panka are not admitted into the jail kitchen. Maria and Muria do not do sweepers' work in the jail,[1] though when a man is hanged Maria prisoners deal

[1] But I believe that Gond prisoners in the Central Provinces are made to work as sweepers, a thing that should never be allowed.

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with the corpse. Short-term prisoners, suitably shackled, are allowed beyond the walls to work in the gardens of the Palace and the higher State officials. Other prisoners learn to make baskets and chiks. But the main prison industry in Jagdalpur, as throughout India, is weaving. Some of the Maria have become experts at this art. I was told that Kunjami Malle and Marvi Tibru were excellent at it, and that Marami Dhurwa of Palnar was so good that he was sent to Raipur for training. In 1940 the receipts from jail industries exceeded Rs 10,000.

Unfortunately no aboriginal prisoner is able to take advantage after his release of the training he receives in jail. For weaving is regarded as the monopoly of the low caste Ganda and Mahara, and no aboriginal will ever degrade himself by practising it. Should he do so, he would be excommunicated, he would be unable to marry his daughters and he would be forbidden access to his clan and village festivals. I have constantly enquired about this and especially as to whether there is any reason behind it. Nobody seems to know the origin of the taboo. It may date from the days when the aboriginals did not use cloth at all, and regarded it as something foreign and alien. It may have simply come into being because of the Maria's dislike and scorn for the particular castes which practise weaving. It is not impossible, of course, that the Mahara and the Ganda themselves have encouraged the idea so as to enjoy the monopoly of trade. If all the Maria ex-convicts were to set up looms and make their own cloth, the existing weavers would be hard hit financially. I met one Maria who had tried to carry on his weaving work after a term in jail. But there had been such a commotion about it that he had to abandon the project.

It is a pity, I think, that some art or craft could not be taught to aboriginal prisoners, not only in Bastar but throughout India, which would be of value to them after their release. In five, ten or fifteen years a man could become an expert carpenter or wood-carver, a first-rate cook, an admirable market gardener. The Maria do learn a little gardening but they might do more, and carpentry on a large scale would be invaluable. For the aboriginal blacksmiths, whether they be Maria Lohar in Bastar or Agaria and Asur